The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean- the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down- who is gazing around
with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know
how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

By Mary Oliver from New and Selected Poem

Gratitude Practice

Everyone knows what it means to be grateful...or do we?
There's a certain kind of knowing that comes only from doing. Through practice,
you will deepen your understanding of gratefulness and, better yet, send it out
in ripples, transforming our world.

Gratefulness is the key to a happy life that we hold in our hands, because if we are not
grateful, then no matter how much we have, we will not be happy – we will always want to have
something else or something more.

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy;
they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.

Appreciation can make a day, even change a life.
Your willingness to put it into words is all that is necessary.

I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends,
the old and the new.

Brother David Steindl-Rast
Marcel Proust
Margaret Cousins
Ralph Waldo Emerson
In daily life we must see that it is not happiness that makes us grateful, but gratefulness that makes us happy.

Brother David Steindl-Rast

If the only prayer you said in your whole life was “thank you,” that would suffice.

Meister Eckhart

The deepest craving of human nature is the need to be appreciated.

William James
Gratitude is Good for You

It turns out that gratitude is good for you. Robert Emmons is one of the fathers of the study of gratitude in psychology, and I've seen his name around the blogosphere a lot lately. I decided to investigate.

Emmons & Michael McCullough's 2003 article "Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-being in Daily Life" illustrates some of the effects of gratitude on well-being, exercise, and sleep. The studies suggest that a daily, long-term commitment to thinking about things for which one is grateful result in "... substantial and consistent improvements in people's assessments of ... global well-being." (p. 385)

The article describes three studies. The first showed that undergraduates who were randomly assigned to focus on gratitude ("generosity of friends" & "the Rolling Stones") were generally happier, exercised more, and slept more than those who were randomly asked to focus on "hassles" ("messy kitchen" & "stupid people driving"). This 9-week study was the longest of the three and had the most significant health effects with respect to sleep & exercise. However, subjects only kept track of their gratitude or hassle-o-meter on a weekly basis.

The second study also focused on randomly-assigned undergraduates who kept a daily record of their gratitude or hassles. This study was in effect for 13 days and gratitude subjects "...experienced higher levels of positive affect during the 13-day period" (p. 383) but had no significant difference in any health measures. The third study assessed adults suffering from chronic disease for three weeks rather than two; subjects were randomly asked to keep a record of daily gratitude and their overall well-being or just a daily record of their overall well-being. Subjects' spouses or significant others were also asked to keep a log of the subjects' overall well-being.

The third study showed that folks in the "gratitude manipulation" group showed an increase in positive affect and a reduction in negative affect, and that "gratitude intervention" improved the amount and quality of subjects' sleep.
More significantly, the spouses and significant others agreed with the grateful subjects' self-assessment and rated them "... as higher in positive affect." Other than sleep, however, there were no other health effects seen; this is likely because the study lasted only 3 weeks and not 9 as in Study 1.

For More Information


The Osgood File (CBS Radio Network): 7/12/02
Researchers find the virtues of gratitude include good health.

In recent years, many scientists have begun examining the links between religion and good health, both physical and mental. Now two psychologists are working to unlock the puzzle of how faith might promote happiness. Dr. Michael McCullough, of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, and Dr. Robert Emmons, of the University of California at Davis, say their initial scientific study indicates that gratitude plays a significant role in a person's sense of well-being.

From Cicero to Buddha, many philosophers and spiritual teachers have celebrated gratitude. The world's major religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hindu, prize gratitude as a morally beneficial emotional state that encourages reciprocal kindness. Pastors, priests, parents and grandparents have long extolled the virtues of gratitude, but until recently, scholars have largely ignored it as a subject of scientific inquiry.

McCollough and Emmons were curious about why people involved in their faith seem to have more happiness and a greater sense of well-being than those who aren't and decided to study the connections. After making initial observations and compiling all the previous research on gratitude, they conducted the Research Project on Gratitude and Thanksgiving. The study required several hundred people in three different groups to keep daily diaries. The first group kept a diary of the events that occurred during the day, while the second group recorded their unpleasant experiences. The last group made a daily list of things for which they were grateful. The results of the study indicated that daily gratitude exercises resulted in higher reported levels of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, optimism and energy. Additionally, the gratitude group experienced less depression and stress, was more likely to help others, exercised more regularly and made more progress toward personal goals. According to the findings, people who feel grateful are also more likely to feel loved. McCollough and Emmons also noted that gratitude encouraged a positive cycle of reciprocal kindness among people since one act of gratitude encourages another.

McCullough says these results also seem to show that gratitude works independently of faith. Though gratitude is a substantial part of most religions, he says the benefits extend to the general population, regardless of faith or lack thereof. In light of his research, McCullough suggests that anyone can increase their sense of well-being and create positive social effects just from counting their blessings.

CONTACTS
Michael McCullough: Professor of Psychology
Southern Methodist University
6425 Boaz Lane
Dallas, TX 75205

Robert Emmons: Professor of Psychology
University of California, Davis
One Shields Avenue, Davis, CA 95616